SIKHISM
-ITS IDENTITY-

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PREFACE

The past few decades have witnessed a mounting interest in Sikhism as a world religion, partly because of events in the Punjab, but largely because of the rapidly increasing Sikh diaspora in major Western countries. On account of its Indian origin Sikhism has frequently been confused with Hinduism, and described as one of its numerous cults. In particular, Western scholars who have no direct access to the original version of the hymns of Guru Nanak, the founder of this religion, and his successors, or to other primary sources, find it convenient to accept this erroneous view.

Two broad categories of religions are recognised, viz., dichotomous and whole-life religions. In the former, life is divided into separate, sometimes mutually opposing, spiritual and empirical compartments. Religious practices are confined to the pursuit of spiritual activities only, virtually to the exclusion of the entire empirical life, which is, in fact, looked upon as a suffering, *mithya* or undesirable. The general outlook is purely otherworldly. All the dichotomous or pacifist systems share some common features like acseticism, monasticism, celibacy, *ahimsa*, pacifism, etc. Social responsibility is not propagated, and economic activity and production, so essential for sustenance of life, are looked down upon. Woman is considered inferior and the Hindu group of religions also sanctions caste hierarchy. On the other hand, a whole-life religious system covers the entire life of the individual, and extends to the social structure and functioning of the society as well. Complementarity of empirical and spiritual life is recognised. A householder's life is the rule, and full social responsibility is accepted. Without going into further details, it should be clear that the two categories are poles apart, and a religious system belonging to one cannot simultaneously belong to the other.

If Guru Nanak had not left any successor to continue his mission, his *bani* would have been equated with the Vedas, and Sikhism would have become another cult of Hinduism. Guru Nanak wanted to project to the world a whole-life system, which was not possible in one life span. Before his demise Guru Nanak, in addition to giving spiritual teachings, lived the life of a householder, doing

farming at Kartarpur. He bowed to Guru Angad (Second Nanak) and installed him as Guru. The succeeding Nanaks not only revealed further *gurbani*, but also continued to project the Sikh way of life. To give one example, Guru Arjun (Fifth Nanak), the compiler of Guru Granth Sahib, not only revealed the maximum number of hymns, but also became the first Sikh martyr. The Sixth Nanak organised a well equipped and trained army of 2200, and fought four major battles. Living according to the dictates of *gurbani*, was thus practically demonstrated for two hundred years. Giving up life for the sake of principles could not be taught by discourse only. That it was not an episodic event, the concept of martyrdom had to be confirmed by the Ninth Nanak, when he sacrificed his life along with three other Sikhs to uphold the right of individuals to live according to the dictates of one's religious beliefs. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Nanak, sacrificed his four sons along with thousands of Sikhs to further confirm the philosophy of martyrdom. This concept of martyrdom did not exist in the earlier Indian religious thought.

In his hymns Guru Nanak has left no doubt that, far from being an illusion, the world is real, rather human life is the only opportunity to realise God. His God is all Love, and pervades the entire universe. As a Loving Father, He loves the entire life and mankind, and particularly showers His blessings where the lowliest are cared for. He also destroys those who perpetrate injustice and cruelty on the less fortunate sections of society or the weak. He is the Fount of all virtues and thus the source of all morality and ethical behaviour. While Guru Nanak enjoined all to see the Creator in all beings, through the immanence of Naam, he laid maximum emphasis on truthful living and service of the community. He rejected asceticism, monasticism, withdrawal, celibacy, etc., preached by earlier Indian traditions, as parasitism, and prescribed a householder's life for his followers. He preached perfect equality not only between man and man, but also between man and woman. He raised his voice against social injustice and oppression. It was his exhortation that ultimately led to the creation of the Khalsa that took upon itself the task of confronting injustice and tyranny in an organised way. He removed all unnecessary barriers like *ahimsa* that

stood in the way of man's struggle against injustice, exploitation and oppression.

Sikhism clearly belongs to the category of whole-life religions, and stands distinctly apart from all other Indian traditions. It is evident that Sardar Daljeet Singh's conclusions in this essay are based not only on the *bani* of Guru Nanak and his successors, but also on a close study of the lives of the Gurus and the subsequent history of the Sikhs. It should leave no doubt about the identity of Sikhism and its whole-life worldview. These views have been expressed earlier by the author in The Sikh Review.

The present edition is brought out in response to a continuing demand, especially from abroad. This has been done in deference to the wishes of one of our distinguished readers, who prefers to remain anonymous, and who has borne the cost of its publication. On behalf of the Institute I take this opportunity to record our appreciation of his generous gesture.

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SIKHISM: ITS IDENTITY

For some years past there have, even in the academic field, been politically oriented writings, some open, some oblique, attacking the identity of Sikhism as an independent religion. In this article we propose examining the issue with particular reference to the statements of a well-known writer. In 1963, he recorded in his "History of the Sikhs", under the caption 'The Teaching of Nanak': "Nanak not only founded a new religion and started a new pattern of living, he also set in motion an agrarian movement whose inpact was felt all over the country".[1] In 1984 he wrote about Guru Nanak in 'The Punjab Story': "Being himself a Hindu was at the same time concerned with reforming Hinduism. But as the years went by and his message caught on among the masses, he decided to give his teachings permanency through a sect of his own".[2] Evidently, the 'sect' which he indicates is of Hinduism. In 1991, in the Illustrated Weekly he stated: "Sikhism is an offshoot of Hinduism and is only disinguished from it by the external symbols of the Khalsa faith. The theology is entirely Hindu". "Almost nine tenths of Granth Sahib, composed largely by Guru Arjun, is in fact Vedanta, and essence of all that you read in the Upanishads and the Gita".[3] Apparently, for a normal reader, these are three variant statements, although the usual plea taken by some writers is that the context has not been taken into account. The first statement clearly states that Guru Nanak's teachings and his religion are new. The second statement does give Sikhism the status of a sect, but within the Hindu fold. The last observation says that it is a Hindu branch, being virtually Upanishadic and Vedantic in character. May be, consistency has not been the virtue of political writers, or, may be, there are other reasons or compulsions for the seemingly shifting stand of the learned writer.

It is also reported that in an entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th Edition Volume 27), considered to be authored by him, he observed, "Sikhism was a historical development of the Hindu Vaishnava Bhakti movement - a devotional movement among followers of god Vishnu - that began in Tamil Country, and

was introduced to the North by Ramanuja (traditionally, 1017-1137)".

Accordingly, it is necessary to analyse and compare the doctrines of Vedanta, Vaisnavism and Sikhism so as to understand the ideological stand of the three systems, and to know whether there is any affinity between Sikhism, on the one hand, and Vedanta and Vaisnavism, on the other hand; or, whether they are systems fundamentally opposed in their essentials. We shall consider the subject in reference to the spiritual experience of the Gurus, their concept of God, their goal, their methodology and their approach to the empirical life.

SIKHISM

Sikhism is a revelatory religion, and this claim is made by Guru Nanak himself, "O Lalo, I speak what the Lord commands me to convey".[4] Other Gurus have also spoken similarly. In the Siddh Gosht he says in reply to a question that his mission in life is, with the help of other Godmen, to ferry people across the turbulent sea of life.[5] As to the Guru's concept of God, it is recorded, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is All Love; rest He is ineffable".[6] He is also called: 'Ocean of Virtues', 'Benevolent', 'Gracious', 'Eyes to the blind', 'Milk to the child', 'Riches to the poor', [7] etc. He is interested in the world. For, "True is He. True is His creation".[8] "God created the world and permeated it with His light".[9] "God created the world of life and planted Naam in it, making it the place for righteous activity".[10] "It is the innermost nature of God to help the erring".[11]

God being Love, it means He is Creative and Dynamic; second, He is the Fount of all values; third, He has a Direction or a Will; and fourth, He is deeply concerned with the world, since Love can be expressed only in a becoming universe. For, the Guru says that when God was all by Himself, and the world was not there, the question of devotion or love or time could not arise. Further, it is because of his concept of a Loving Divinity that Guru Nanak calls life a game of love, saying, "If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm."[12]

There are five clear corollaries of 'God is Love', and, 'life being a game of love'. First, that the world is real, against its being *mithya*, a misery, or a suffering as in other Indian systems. The second corollary is that Sikhism involves a combination of the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. In other words it is a whole-life system, a *miri-piri* system, whereunder man has to be both God-aware and Earth-aware. This is against the generally known life-negation of the Hindu systems. The third corollary is that the householder's life is accepted, and monasticism and *sanyasa* are rejected. For, "The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words or talk, but by treating all alike. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but by remaining God-centred and doing the affairs of the world".[13] It is for this reason that Guru Nanak made Guru Angad, a householder, his successor, and by-passed his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse. The fourth corollary is that since God is working the world with His Altruistic Will, the goal of life of the seeker and the Gurmukh is not withdrawal, but to work actively according to God's Altruistic Will. 'One gets not to God by despising the world'.[14] 'One gets liberated even while laughing and playing'.[15] 'The God-centred lives truthfully while a householder'.[16] Hence the goal is not merger in Brahman, but an active life of the Gurmukh living truthfully. Fifth, such being the goal, Guru Nanak and the other Gurus prescribe a religious methodology of deeds. For, 'with God only the deeds one does in the world count'.[17] 'True living is living God in life'.[18] 'It it is by our deeds that we become near or away from God.[19] 'Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice are the ways to realise the essence of God'.[20] 'Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtue enable the seed of Naam (God) to sprout'.[21] 'Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living'.[22] Guru Nanak was called a Gurmukh, and how a Gurmukh should live, has been historically demonstrated by the ten Gurmukhs and their 'truthful living'.

Next we come to the implications of living according to the altruistic Will of God defined above. Truthful living involves five responsibilities of the religious man. The first is to accept equality

between man and woman, instead of considering her a temptress or an impediment in the religious path. In fact, considering the position of woman in other religions, including Christianity, it is a revolutionary step of Guru Nanak when he recommends the householder's path, and rejects celibacy which in other Indian religions is an essential discipline for the seeker. The second implication is of accepting equality between man and man. It was a major blow to the system of Varn Ashram Dharma and the allied concept of pollution. The Gurus have emphatically stated that the religious man must treat everyone equally. Guru Nanak by taking Mardana, a Muslim Mirasi as his life companion, took a major step against untouchability, caste system and the Muslims being considered *malechhas*. The institution of *langar,* started by him, had also the same objective in view. The third implication of the Guru's system is work and production. Guru Nanak says: "The person incapable of earning his living, gets his ears split, (i.e. turns a Nath Yogi), and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a guru or a saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others".[23] Hence, work and sustenance of life and the world become an essential duty of the religious man. Upto the time of the Fifth Guru all the Gurus were married householders doing a profession or business. It is only when the organisation of militancy and confrontation with the Empire became an absorbing and hazardous duty, involving frequent movements and military clashes, that the later Gurus remained wholly concerned with the work of the Sikh Movement. Fourth is the important implication of the sharing of wealth. The Guru says, 'God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves'.[24] 'Man gathers riches by making others miserable'.[25] 'Riches cannot be gathered without sin, but these do not keep company after death'.[26] Guru Nanak's acceptance of Lalo's invitation and rejecting that of Malik Bhago, indicates his censure of exploitative living. The fifth implication is Guru Nanak's condemnation of injustice and oppression. He calls God the 'Destroyer of evil-doers'[27] and also the 'Punisher of the demonical'.[28] The hymns that He is 'Shelter to the shelterless; and showers His grace where the weak are cared for',[29] also indicate the same thing. Guru Nanak decried the rulers who

were unable to provide security and saftey to their subjects, and condemned the tyranny of the invaders. His complaint to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong, clearly means two things. First, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God, and that, as such, it is the duty of the man of religion to see that injustice and oppression do not occur, and, if they do, the man of religion must individually and socially confront such injustice and oppression. Since large scale aggression and encroachments are always done by political groups or the State, there is the essential need of organising a society that should take up such challenges and resist injustice. The important fact is that the five implications of Guru Nanak's system mentioned above are not just paper directions. But in his system, these are the five responsibilities enjoined on the man of religion, and this is why Guru Nanak asks for total commitment while giving the call for the game of love. Similar total commitment was indicated by the Fifth Guru, when he advised Bhai Manjh that he should better continue being a Sakhi Sarwaria, instead of becoming a Sikh, which involved a major risk both to his life and his wealth. [30] And, it is the same total commitment that the Tenth Master asked for while selecting the Five Piyaras for administering Amrit. In Sikhism spiritual responsibilities and worldly responsibilities are combined inalienably, it being a *miri-piri* system.

It is in this context that the three uncommon steps, which Guru Nanak took, show the independence and radical nature of his system. The first step was the organisation of a *sangat* or society at his own place and at every place he visited. Because, Sikhism is not a salvation religion for a few individuals, but a whole-life system with socio-spiritual responsibilities both to God and man. The second uncommon step was his starting the institution of successors. As the society he had organised, was only at the infant stage, and as its principles were entirely different from the principles in vogue in the country, the motivation of his flock and its organisation into a well-knit society had naturally to take very long. The third step was his clear rejection of *ahimsa*. He stated, 'Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating. They do not know what is flesh and what

is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin'.[31] He also stated that life was in every grain of food. What he meant was to reject the seeming value or the piety of observing certain rituals or of religious prohibitions against meat-eating. Actually his particular definition of God as 'Destroyer of the evil-doers and the demonical', mentioned above, also shows his rejection of *ahimsa*. He explained all this because he envisaged his society to take up political challenges. This was also repeated by Guru Hargobind when he spoke to Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra, saying that Guru Nanak never gave up this world, and that his sword was to protect the weak and to destroy the tyrant.[32]

So far as his whole-life thesis was concerned, it stood clearly explained in the *bani* of Guru Nanak; and yet he started the system of succession, indicating that his mission, as a whole, still required completion and for that reason continuance. In any case, Guru Granth Sahib, the Scripture, had been compiled by the Fifth Master, and yet the succession was continued, until the Tenth Master created the Khalsa, introduced the Nash doctrine of the five freedoms from earlier religions, customs, lineage, taboos,[33] etc. He closed the institution of succession, obviously because the Sikhs had been well organised as a cohesive society, and which under Banda Singh brought about an unprecedented social revolution.

We do not want to go into the details of how each Guru calculatedly enlarged, organised and motivated the Sikh society into a well-knit and responsible organisation. But we should like to state one fact as to how detailed was Guru Nanak's criticism of various evils in the contemporary society. He criticised the greed, and hypocrisy of the priests, *pandits* and *mullahs*, the corruption, injustice and blood-sucking practised by officials of different levels in the administration, the discriminatory and high-handed misrule, oppression and tyranny of the rulers, the barbarity and brutality of the invaders, etc. There was hardly any dark spot in the religious or the socio-political life of his times which he did not point out. His ciriticism meant two things. First, that faults in empirical life were the concern of the religious man, and, second, that their rectification was also the moral responsibility of the spiritual man. Guru Nanak's

criticism was not idle rhetoric. The contrast between his criticism and point of view, and the approach of a religious man like St. Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian Gospel and theology and the author of 'City of God', is clear from the following observation of Bertrand Russell: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned not with saving of civilisation, or expelling the barbarians, or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merits of virginity and the damnation of the unbaptised infants. Seeing that these were the occupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition".[34] The contrast between the concerns of Guru Nanak, a Gurmukh of a *miri-piri* system, and the interests of a pious theologian from a pacificist system, is too obvious to need further comments. The spiritual experience and the concept of the Ultimate Reality of the founding prophet, forms the bedrock, on which are based the goal, the methodology, the ethics and the doctrines of a system. A brief outline of the essentials of Sikh Monotheism has been given above. Hereafter follows a corresponding description of Vaisnavism and Vedanta.

VAISNAVISM

It is generally accepted that Bhagwatism arose as a non-Vedic cult[35] which for the first time, was included in the Hindu Complex, as an alternative mode of Moksha in the Bhagwad Gita which is admittedly an eclectic compilation.[36] The system is ritualistic, and involves: (i) visit to the temple, (ii) selection of material for worship, (iii) salutation and resorting to the feet of Hari, and (iv) surrender of the soul with devotion.[37] It is significant that this Bhakti is entirely ritualistic, without any reference to socio-moral conduct. Second, it was accepted only as an alternative mode of Moksha, and was given a lower priority. Bhagawad Gita does not prescribe a unified system. Apart from the different modes of Moksha being unintegrated into any unified whole, the metaphysical position is also incongruous, because the dualism of Yoga and the pantheism of Upanishads, exist side by side with the concept of Vedic ritualism

and mysticism.[38] It is believed that the Gita was more concerned in bringing variant systems within the Hindu fold than with their integration into a systematic rational whole; and that the permission of Sudras and women to the path of devotion was allowed because Buddhists had allowed them to their monastries without discrimination.[39] This is supported by the fact that the Gita gives full sanction to the discriminatory rigidity of the caste system. It says that the Lord created the four Varnas with their separate specified duties; and that it is more meritorious to do, even though inefficiently, the duties of one's own caste, than to do, even though efficiently, the duties of another caste. "Congenital duty, O son of Kunti, though defective, ought not be abandoned".[40] "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment, and yet, on the other hand, we continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or stage of life, i.e., the prescribed stages of Four Ashrams".[41] In the Bhagawad Gita and the system of Ramanuja, Bhakti meant only *Upasna* and just meditation with contemplative union with God as the goal. This Bhakti does not involve any devotional or personal love.[42] The duties prescribed are just those of one's caste or profession. Any mobility in choosing a profession is barred. In the social field caste ideology was supreme. Arjun was induced to take up arms, because that was his caste duty as a Kshatriya. It has been the duty of kings to keep Brahmin advisers, maintain the caste order, and to do justice according to caste rules.[43]

Later arose the theory of Avtaarhood, meaning that God incarnated Himself in order to save man. This doctrine is a Vaisnava contribution. It is believed that, as in the case of eclectic Bhagawad Gita, the doctrine of Avtaarhood was only a way of absorbing heterodox and variant cults, by declaring their gods to be the incarnations of Vishnu.[44] Accordingly, founders of even dualistic systems like Sankhya and Jainism, Kapila and Rsabha respectively, were declared Avtaars. While this doctrine helped the absorption of heterodox creeds, and made the new entrants to accept the authority of the Vedas and the Brahminical ideology of the caste, it could evidently not make for the development of a coherent or

unified religious or metaphysical system, prescribing an integrated methodology or goal.

The next phase in Vaisnavism is the period of Sandilya and Bhagwat Purana. Alwar saints appeared in the South, and saints like Tukaram, Ramanand, Mirabai, Chaitanya and others, arose in the West, North and East of India. Dr Tara Chand believes that this development took place, quite often in the lower sections of the Hindu society, following the influence and impact of Islam, which was non-hierarchical. Although there are many exponents of Vaisnavism like Nimbarka, or Madhava who is a dualist, Ramanuja, the author of 'Vashist Advaita', is considered to be the best among them. His system is pantheistic, Brahman being both manifest and unmanifest. The individual souls and the material world are considered the body or the attributes of Brahman.[45] He accepts the presence of Ahankara, and explains human activity virtually on the basis of dualistic Sankhya. Ishwara exists in five forms, (i) as Narayana or Paravasudeva, wearing jewels and ornaments, he lives in Vaikuntha on a throne, surrounded by Sesa (the Serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls, (ii) as in four other forms including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship him, (iii) as in the Avtaras, Lord Rama, Fish, Tortoise, Swan and others, (iv) as in the soul of each being when it goes to heaven or hell, and (v) as in the idols kept in houses. Souls are of three kinds: (i) eternal souls like that of Garuda, (ii) the delivered souls, and (iii) the bound ones.[46]

The Bhakti is integrated with ritualism and Jnanayoga, which are its essential components. Ramanuja considers Vedic ritualism and Brahm Vidya of Upanishads as of equal validity, so much so, that ritualistic acts have to be practised even by a Jnani. This Bhakti is open only to the three higher castes. To Sudras only the system of surrender or Prapati is open.[47] The caste ideology and ideas of pollution, are accepted and practised. Brahmins only can be priests for idol worship. The concept of pollution is so important that if while cooking or eating one's food, another person casts a glance on it, the entire food has to be thrown away.[48] Celibacy is recommended and women are considered sin-born. They are, after therefore neither admitted as Vaisnavas nor to the study of Vedas.[49]

In Bhagvat Purana nine modes of worship are suggested, which are all ritualistic, like listening to the praise of God, repeating the name of God, image worship, etc., without any socio-moral activity. Padma Purana prescribes seven modes of worship, (i) imprinting of marks on the body and forehead, (ii) repeating *mantras,* (iii) drinking water used for the feet of the idol, (iv) eating food offered to the idol, (v) service of the devotees, (vi) fasting on designated days of the lunar month, and (vii) laying *tulsi* leaves at the feet of the idol.[50]

Both Vallabha and Chaitanya accept Bhakti as the sole mode of Moksha. In Vallabha's system the modes of worship are all formal, like singing the praises of God, Aarti, image worship, etc. A householder's life is allowed, but the devotee visits the temple of the Guru for worship of the idol at fixed intervals.[51] For Chaitanya, Bhakti is extremely emotional, involving ecstatic dancing and singing. His devotees were from all castes and creeds, including Muslims. But, the followers, except for Bairagis, observed the caste system, regarding cooking and other matters. The spiritual teachers are celibates.[52]

It is necessary to state that Karma yoga meant ritual acts and not socio-moral deeds.[53] Because of general insistence on celibacy, socio-moral activity is virtually excluded. Maitra who made a detailed study of the ethics of all Hindu systems, writes that a common feature of the doctrine of the ideal life, is "the conception of the ideal as a negation or at least as a transcendence of the empirical life proper and that this state is thus a supermoral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral idea.[54] "It is a transcendental state of deliverance from all struggles of life."[55]

In sum, Vaisnavism has seven fundamentals. Its scriptures, as of all Hindu systems, are the Vedas and Upanishads. Second, it accepts the doctrine of Avtaarhood. Third, the ideology of caste is accepted fully, as also the concept of pollution. Fourth, the methodology of worship or devotion is formal, ritualistic, contemplative, or intensely emotional, without any reference to socio-moral activity. Hooper, who has made a detailed study of Alwar saints, says that moral character is hardly a strong feature of their

Bhakti.[56] Fifth, the entire approach is other- worldly, and for liberation from the tangles of life. Consequently, except in the case of Vallabha, celibacy is the rule, and the position of woman is distinctly downgraded, being considered a temptress. Ramanuja denies Vedic studies to women. They were not allowed to become nuns. Shankradeva, a liberal saint, says, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayers, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women".[57] This saint did not allow women to join the religious functions of men. It is stated that he was interested only in: "Establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than a social overhaul. The trouble about the improvement of social conditions, perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable". Sixth, *ahimsa* is prescribed as a cardinal rule for all Vaisnavas. Seventh, the goal is union with or merger in God or Brahman. The Jivan Mukta has no role to play in life, although ritualistic duties are prescribed until the end of one's days. In Hinduism the sexual or Tantric method is accepted as an alternative system of Moksha, and a saint like Rama Krishana[58] also accepts its validity.

VEDANTA

Basically Upanishadic thought is the Vedantic thought. This system is mainly opposed to the earlier Vedic ritualism (Purva Mimansa). But in itself it is very variant. It can form the basis of Pantheism, Monism, Materialism, etc., i.e. of the world being the emanation of Brahman, the world being just illusory, and Brahman alone being real, etc.[59] Philosophers like Shankra, Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and others, have all given divergent interpretations of the Upanishads. Upanishadic thoughts were not meant to be a religious system. These comprise teachings meant only for a small section most of whom had withdrawn to the seclusion of the forest. The search was for an intuitional and mystic experience of unity with Brahman, with the knowledge of which everything became known. The fundamental reality is not personal, like God of theists to whom one prays with devotion and love. Hence the concepts of "That thou art", "I am Brahman", of Katha Upanisad, "He who perceives diver-

sity in this world, suffers the death of all deaths", and of Brahman alone being real, the rest being false and illusory.[60] Upanishads being speculative, contained divergent and contradictory thoughts without any attempt to reconcile them. The methodology is primarily meditational with the ideal of four Ashramas, the last two Ashramas being basically other-worldly and ascetic, involving disconnection with the delusive secular life.[61] The final achievement is the result of one's own efforts and not the gift of God or His grace. The Jivanmukta has no role to play and is indifferent to all activity, good or bad.[62] For, he transcends the condition of worldly existence. Later, the authors of the Upanishads also accepted the validity of Vedic ritualism and its social commands regarding caste. As such, they have become a component of the over all Vedic system, and have got scriptural sanctity as a limb of the Vedas. This background of the various Upanishads has to be kept in view in understanding Vedanta. Hiriyanna writes, "The diversity of teaching noticed in connection with theoretical teaching of the Upanishada has its reflex in their means of achieving it."[63] "For example, one Upanishad alone mentions three such different means of attaining immortality - devotion to truth, penance, and Vedic study and ascribing them to three specific teachers".[64] Second, the Upanishads and the sanctioned social system of the period gave clear approval to the caste system. The Chandogya writes, "The wicked are born again as outcastes, dogs or swine".[65] The Brihadaraniyaka (VI. 2, 15-16) gives a similar account. Evidently, the Upanishadic system, although other-worldly and meditational, accepts the ritualism and the caste ideology of the Vedas. We have briefly indicated the views of Ramanuja and his Vashist Advaita. We give hereafter the Vedanta of Shankra, which is the most popular Vedantic system.

Shankra and his predecessor Gaudapada pursue the line of thought in the Upanishads which considers the world to be just *mithya* (illusion), and Brahman alone to be real. Gaudapada, writes, "The manifold universe does not exist as a form of reality, nor does it exist of itself". "Having attained to non-duality one should behave in this world like an insensible object".[66] According to Shankra, all diversity is false (*mithya*). Therefore, to work while accepting the

phenomenal existence of the world is sheer *avidya* (ignorance). The goal is to realise the truth of Brahman alone being real, and to deny the world. Ishwara and individual souls are parts of Brahman. Man is ignorant, since he fails to realise that all change in the world is without meaning or validity. This view denies the very basis of all socio-moral life. Shankra says, "I am not born. How can there be either birth or death for me? I am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the blessed peaceful one who is the only cause of origin and dissolution of the world".[67] Change in the world is due to Maya which is neither real nor unreal, nor related to Brahman. The methods of devotion or worship are considered fruitless, the goal being the Absolute and not Saguna Brahman, God or Ishwara, which is a lower stage to be transcended by the Jnani. The path of devotion, he says, is for persons of narrow or poor intellect.[68] As he cannot deny the scriptural character of the Vedas, he says that the path of ritualism or sacrifices is prescribed out of compassion for persons of low or average intellect, and it can gain for them only heaven.[69] As in Sankhya yoga, withdrawal form the illusory adjuncts of Maya is suggested. Starting with Vairagya and dissociation with the world, the mystic achievement can be made only as Sanyasin, by giving up all works, good or bad, and as one who is unwilling to accept even the grace of God. The methodology is of Vedic study, reflection and meditation. The goal is to realise, 'I am Brahman, (Aham Brahm asmi).' It is an intellectual realisation accompanied by Anubhava. The Jivanmukta has no role to play in life.[70] Swami Sivananda writes, about the modern Jnanis, Kalkotswami and Mowni Swami, saying that they "were unconscious of the movement of their bowels, and the Sevakas had to wash their bottoms."[71] Such a Videhimukta "whose individuality is absolutely merged in Brahman, cannot have the awareness of the world which is non-existent to him. If his body is to be maintained, it has to be fed and cared for by others. The Videhimukta is thus not in a position to engage himself for the good of the World".[72] Self realisation breaks the chain of causation and the world appears false to him. Even the idea of God, being of a lower level, has finally to be transcended. For, "God is only the most sutbtle, most magnificient, most flattering false impression of all in this general spectacle of erroneous self-

deception."[73] Evidently, celibacy is recommended and Shankra calls woman the 'gateway to hell'.[74] No wonder Zimmer writes, "Such holy magalomania goes past the bounds of sense. With Sankara, the grandeur of the Supreme human experience becomes intellectualized and reveals its inhuman sterility".[75] Such is Sankara's monism for which the world is *mithya*.

CLASSIFICATION

In the above background, we should like to give a broad classification of the different religious systems of the world. First, is the category of religious systems, including practically all Indians systems, except Sikhism. They are dichotomous in the sense that the paths of spiritual life and the empirical life are separate. The two Hindu systems outlined above, belong to this class. In them monasticism, asceticism, pacificism, *sanyasa*, celibacy, downgrading of women, caste ideology in the social life, and *ahimsa* are normal features. For that reason, they are considered life-negating, socio-moral activities, as concluded by Maitra, being irrelevant and of no consequence. The goal is merger in Brahman or the realisation 'I-am Brahman'. Metaphysically, these systems are either pantheistic or monistic.

To the second category, belongs Christianity. It is a life-affirming system, but accepts pacificism, monasticism, celibacy and nunneries as a valid path of spiritual life. To that extent there is dichotomy in Catholic Christianity. Women are still not ordained as priests. Life participation is accepted, but the Sermon on the Mount prescribes non-resistance or pacificism. It is a Theism, accepting participation in life and calls God Love. But, because of the appearance of monasticism and celibacy, it has, like dichotomous systems, become a salvation religion, more especially after the coming up of Science and Technology, when Secularism has become supreme in the empirical life. The religion is exclusive in the sense that salvation can be sought only through Christ.

To the third category, belong the whole-life or *miri-piri* systems of Judaism and Islam. Prophet Moses and Prophet Mohammad were simultaneously spiritual and political leaders. In both the

systems, organisation of social life and a religious society are accepted as the duties and responsibilities of the religious man. Similarly, the use of force for a righteous cause is also sanctioned. But, in both these religions, in the later part of their history, pacificism, monasticism, asceticism, withdrawal from life and even celibacy, have appeared forming separate sects of these religions, like Essenese, Kaballists, etc., in the former case, and different Silsilas or sects of Sufis in the latter case. This has led to dichotomous tendencies in the life of these otherwise whole-life or *miri-piri* religions. Besides, both these religions are exclusive.

To the fourth category belongs Sikhism. It is a whole-life or a *miri-piri* system, involving participation in life and total socio-political responsibility. In addition, it has three other features. By prescribing the Kirpan as a part of the wear of Sikhs two things have been emphasised by the Tenth Master. First, that the Sikh should not at any time forget his social responsibility concerning injustice and oppression. The Kirpan as a Hukumnama (order) of the Guru reminds him of the history and tradition created by the Gurus regarding the social responsibilities of the Sikh society. Second, the Kirpan stands as a warning that in Sikhism the paths of withdrawal, pacificism or monasticism are considered invalid. The point is clarified by the fact that the Sufis never organised a resistance against the tyrannical rule of the times, although some of them did side with the Gurus; and it was left to the Sikh Gurus to confront the misrule of the Empire. Its two other features relate to its universalism. For, the Guru prays to God to help the troubled world by any means, He may be Gracious enough to do.[76] Second, it is Guru Nanak who says that his mission is, with co-operation of other Godmen, to ferry men across the troubled sea of life.[77]

Hence the above four clear categories, each one of which has many of its essentials quite distinct from those of the other three.

CONCLUSION

We have stated that the fundamental that determines the essential principles of a religious system, is the spiritual experience of the Prophet, saint or seer, and his vision of the Ultimate Reality.

In the case of Hindu systems, especially the Vedanta, the Reality is *sat-chit-ananda*. It is thus a quietist concept of tranquility, peace, truth and bliss. As against it, in the concept of the Gurus, God is Love and an Ocean of Values, a God of Will giving direction to the World, and a Benevolent Enlightener. This determines for the seeker, who is to carry out His Altruistic Will, total responsibility in all walks of life, God's domain being unlimited. The distinction about the Fundamental Reality, we have indicated, is real, and not just argumentative. For, this is the first and fundamental cause of difference between dichotomous religions mentioned above and the life-affirming religions like Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. Stace has tabulated the spiritual experience of mystics from the world over. He records blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary consciousness, paradoxicality, etc., as the features of their experience.[78] Similarly, William James also records that experience to be passive, noetic, ineffable, transient, and unitary in consciousness.[79] Neither of them states 'Love' as the feature of that religious experience. But Bergson, in his statement about the ultimate mystic experience calls 'love' the principal feature; the other or quietist experiences, he thinks, do not constitute the final achievement of the mystic path; and it is for that reason that such mystics are not fully creative and life-affirming. For him, the test of such experience is that for mystics having the summit experience, the love of God is transformed into God's love for all beings in the shape of their activities and functioning.[80] That is the reason that the parable of Abu Ben Adam is a model in a whole-life religion like Islam. That the distinction is not artificial, has also been stressed by Aldous Huxley: "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one, and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no me any more and a kind of *sat-chit-ananda*, at one moment without *karuna* or charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about Love) ... I had an inkling of both kinds of *nirvana* - the loveless being, consciousness, bliss, and the one with love, and above all, sense that one can never love enough'.[81] "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment to the rest of the world - this is perfectly expressed today, in powerful slang,

in the phrase 'dropping out'. It completely denies the facts, it is morally wrong; and finally of course, absolutely catastrophic". "Absolutely Catastrophic".[82] "Love and Work - if I should put in a nutshell the essence of Aldous's life. I could not find a more precise way of saying it", writes his wife.[83] What needs emphasis is the fundamental difference between the spiritual experience of the Gurus and that of the Hindu mystics-cum-philosophers. It is because of this basic difference that one system becomes dichotomous, involving the separation of the empirical life from the religious life, with its features of monasticism, asceticism, *sanyasa*, celibacy and *ahimsa*, in the spiritual life, and the discriminatory and hierarchical caste structure in the empirical life; and the other system becomes whole-life, sanctioning moral activity and total responsibility in the empirical life as outlined earlier.

The Guru's God is both transcendent and immanent, *Sargun* and *Nirgun*,[84] as against the Vedantic concept of Brahman being higher than the concept of Ishwara of God. Second, it, thus, remains unrelated to the delusive world. Third, following from the above, in one case life is real, and in the other case it is *mithya* and an entanglement. Fourth, as against monasticism, asceticism, withdrawal and *sanyasa*, a householder's life is accepted. Fifth, against the recommendation of celibacy and woman being considered a temptress, she is regarded as the equal of man and the mother of all life.[85] Sixth, against *ahimsa*, the use of force for a righteous cause, as a last resort, is accepted. It is no accident that of the ten Gurus, five kept armies, organised militarisation and confrontation with the oppressive Empire. Hence also the warning through the Kakka of Kirpan against diversion or reversion to pacificism or monasticism ignoring social responsibility towards one's fellow beings, cardinally essential in a whole-life system. Seventh, the goal of life is to carry out the Altruistic Will of God,[86] involving creative activity, as against merger in Brahman or realization of 'I-am Brahman'. Eighth, the methodology of virtuous deeds and an active moral life of securing justice, sharing and equality is recommended as against ritualism, reflection, contemplation or

meditation alone, involving a super-moral ethic, and not a moral ethic as in a whole-life system.

Hence there is a complete contrast between the worldview of Vedanta and Vaisnavism, on the one hand, and of Sikhism, on the other hand. Sikhism, we may say, accepts the "idea that specifically designated organised bands of men should play a creative part in the political world destroying the established order, and reconstructing society according to the Word of God".[87] It believes, as observed by Collingwood, "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God, and of God's thought as reaching me; and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God, and an act of God by which He establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life, all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of the religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connection with it, and with each other in it".[88] The Gurus state that unless man reaches the fourth stage of evolution or of Gurmukh, whose consciousness is linked to the Universal Consciousness or Will, man's problems of conflict, poverty, immorality, and war will continue. It is stated, "God created first Himself, then Haumain (a sense of individualism), third, Maya (multifarious beings and entities) and fourth, the higher stage of Gurmukh, who always lives truthfully".[89] Thus, Sikhism is a system of hope, activity and optimism about the future of man, with willingness to co-operate with other religions, while accepting God's graciousness in creating other paths as well.

Our analysis of the three systems reveals that the worldviews of the Hindu systems, namely, Vaisnavism and Vedanta, are entirely different, if not in some sense diametrically apart, from that of Sikhism. Their religious perceptions are different, and consequently their goals, methodologies, approach to the world, ethics, and

worldviews are entirely different. They belong to the class of dichotomous and salvation systems, while Sikhism belongs to a whole-life or *miri-piri* system in which the Gurus have particularly guarded the society against accepting a monastic, pacificist, or life-negating system.

In this context, we fail to find any relevance, meaning, or validity of any observation indicating that Sikhism is a sect or an offshoot of Hinduism, with a common theology, and 'with nine tenths of Guru Granth Sahib being Vedantic in essence'. It is well known that neither Shankra, nor a Jnani, nor a Videhi Mukta would ever, contemplate participation in the world which is non- existent for him, and which activity they consider delusive and a fall. We hope that scholars with a variant view would concede that Guru Arjun who created a 'State within a State' and the following five Gurus, who started militarisation and confrontation with the Empire, well understood the *bani* of Guru Nanak and of the other Gurus. Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose *bani* is also in the Guru Granth Sahib, distinguished himself as a soldier, and for that reason was called Tegh Bahadur. It is he who clearly spurned the offer of the Emperor that if he gave up socio- political activities, or organising what he considered to be 'a Millat and consequent rebellion', and confined himself to prayers and preaching, he would get official grants.[90] For, in the perception of the Moghul Administration: "The Guru was moving around with his disciples, quite intoxicated with pride, with a view to revolt".[91] But, in the Master was burning the same Light of spirituality, the same Spirit of Saint-Soldier as in Guru Nanak. Only because of our personal prejudices and predilections human perceptions vary.

Ideologically, the Sant-Sipahi or whole-life concept is based on the view that cultures that fail to provide for moral moorings, which can be supplied only by religion, so as to enable the society to meet the challenges of the destructive and aggressive forces of life, inevitably decay into dichotomy, involving monasticism, *sanyasa* and other-worldliness as the path of salvation, and unbridled greed and injustice in the empirical life. It is for this reason that the inequity of the caste ideology could survive unchallenged

for over three millenia in India. Similarly, even though Christianity and Christ were life- affirming, it is because of its pacificism and the exposition of its early theologians that made it other-worldly, dichotomous and a religion for the search of a life in heaven. For, Saint Augustine in his 'City of God' clearly believed: "The spread of Christianity would not ensure political and economic improvement. The earthy city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires".[92] It is this dichotomy that led to large scale massacres, ghettos and crusades in the early centuries of the Christian Rule, and Hitler, Stalin and Hiroshima in our century.

We do not propose making any further comments and leave it to the readers to make their judgement on the issue of the independent ideological identity of Sikhism. It is not our intention, in any way, to misunderstand or misrepresent the two Hindu systems. For that reason we have, by and large, purposely confined our interpretation of those systems to what has been expounded by scholars from that society.

In the end, it is essential to record that however honest and analytical may be the interpretation of a believer or of a non-believer in God or the Ultimate Reality, there will continue to be great differences between their views. King writes: "One general conclusion which I draw from a long study of critics, of which the above is a sketch, that it is most important to remember the personality and circumstances of the critic. In a Natrual Science like Chemistry it may not be necessary to know anything about the human being who is writing. In any subject which entails human subjects the work must be put into a personal context. Accordingly, one feels every work of critical scholarship should have a government statutory warning that its consumption may be deleterious to the soul's health. If it is to do with religion, it should also have a statement of ingredients, including the religious standing of the writer. If he or she is a believer, it is necessary to know this, so that the critical reader can allow for bias. If he or she is not a believer, we should have some indication of that too, lest the disillusionment or enlightenment of a post-Christian, a post-Jew or a post-whatever, should give the critic rosy coloured spectacles or a jaun-

diced outlook".[93] It is not our argument that non-believers, atheists or agnostics should not write about religion of their own society or about any other religion. But, we should like to stress that any attempt on the part of a non-believer to be dogmatic about a religion or its principles would be plain naivety.

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